

SPOTLIGHT: Pink-headed Duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.⁴

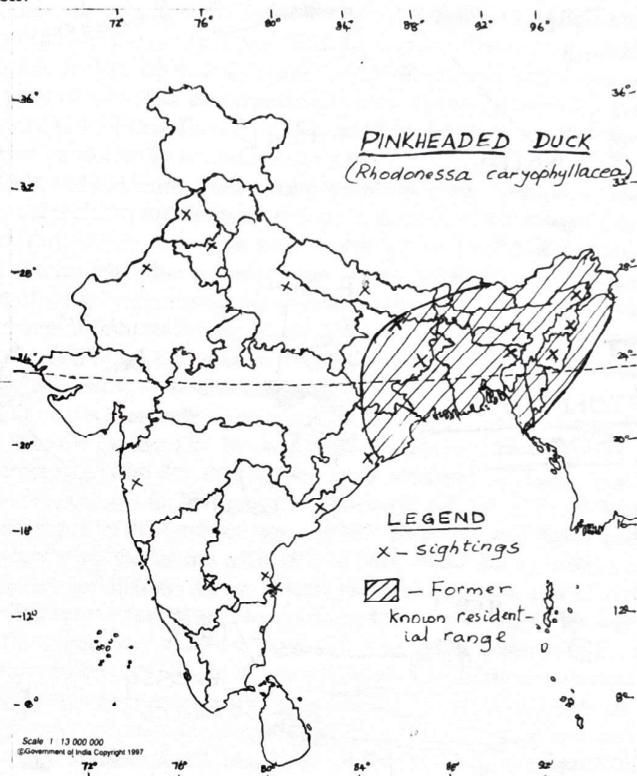
The Pink-headed Duck is probably extinct. Last record is from Darbhanga District, Bihar, in June 1935. There have been several sightings reported, but almost always it turned out to be the Red-crested Pochard. For nearly 150 years (1790) since it was first described till it was last seen (1935), it was probably only local or at the most locally migratory and nowhere common. Small flocks up to 30-40 birds have been recorded but generally only 6-8 ducks were seen together. Only 80 skins/specimens are known to exist worldwide. The small number of specimens and the few ducks that occasionally were found in hunting records, especially at a time when collectors were aplenty and conservation practices never thought about, indicates the rarity of this species even in the 19th century. It was probably resident in Assam, Manipur, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the north-eastern region of India. Stragglers have been recorded in winter from Punjab, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh, it has been seen in Kondakarla Lake (Visakhapatnam District), Nellore and Pulicat (Nellore District). Extralimittally it was recorded from Myanmar (Burma).

The drake has a brownish-black overall plumage with a slightly tufted rosy pink head, hindneck, sides of neck and bill. Legs and feet are reddish-black. In flight the pale pink speculum underwing contrasted prominently with the dark body. The female was overall duller brownish-black, buff-brown speculum, the head, sides of neck and hind neck paler pink than the drake, as also the chin and throat mixing into the brown body. These ducks had a somewhat upright stance like the whistling teals.

Little is known of its feeding habits except that it was probably omnivorous, either surface feeding or sometimes diving. A shy bird, it was rarely seen except when flushed from ponds and other waterbodies from amongst the reeds

and tall grass jungle. Nesting period—June-July (Bihar). The nest is round, built with dry grass and lined with feathers on the ground amongst marshes and tall grass a little away from the shore. Round white eggs, very different from other duck eggs are laid, about 6-10 in a clutch. Incubation period and parental duties—unknown.

Efforts to locate this bird for the past 65 years have not been successful so far. Does it still exist somewhere in its old habitat or has it gone the way of the dodo—only time will tell!


BIRD-WORD: A BIRDPWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled by S. Ashok Kumar

HUNTING PARTIES They are mixed parties of species of birds foraging in the same cliché at various levels.

INCUBATION The process of causing eggs to hatch by the application of heat.

INCUBATION MOUNDS Mounds built by megapodes to incubate their eggs by heat generated from fermentation of vegetation. This is supplemented by solar heat.

INDETERMINATE LAYERS Birds which can be induced to lay additional eggs.

JUVENILE A bird in its first complete contour feathering is described as juvenile.

KERATIN It is the fibrous protein material of feathers in birds.

KLEPTOPARASITISM Robbing another species of its prey is described as kleptoparasitism.

LEK Slightly raised, bare, display area where males of certain species collect for a communal display for few hours a day to dance and display. The female birds gather to select their mates.

⁴ **Errata:** Pitta #113 p. 6 Para. 3 (2nd line): Delete, "...and usually the first...cause it no harm." Para. 4 (1st line): Delete, "...northern Europe...and North Africa..." Substitute "East Africa up to Madagascar," for "North Africa." I thank Mr Lavkumar Khacher for having brought this to my knowledge (SAT).